



Safe and happy
holiday travels!

EXCLUSIVE FOR CLIENTS OF



Travel Watcher

INSIDER NEWS & NOTES FROM YOUR BUSINESS TRAVEL AUTHORITY

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✈ UP IN THE AIR

All U.S.-bound airlines to collect passenger data for watch lists

AP—All 197 airlines that fly to the U.S. are now collecting names, genders and birth dates of passengers so the government can check them against terror watch lists before they fly, the Obama administration announced. The program, called Secure Flight, had been delayed because of privacy concerns. Previously, airlines had been responsible for checking the passenger lists against terror watch lists, but the airlines did not have any information other than a name. Now the screening is done by the TSA. When someone makes a flight reservation, that information goes to the Secure Flight database within seconds.

Wi fly

Lufthansa plans to offer inflight Internet access on Frankfurt/Atlanta and Detroit/New York flights. By the end of 2011, the German carrier intends to outfit "virtually all" of its intercontinental aircraft with Wi-Fi capabilities.

Airports, airlines increase traveler access to alcohol

It's getting easier to grab a drink at the airport and in the air. Some airports now allow liquor to be sold at dawn or around the clock (Chicago), and passengers can experience happy hour at 30,000 feet. Wine aficionados passing through PHL, JFK and SEA can enjoy a tasting without leav-

ing the terminal.

But some union leaders, local officials and frequent fliers fear that the increased access to alcohol raises the risk of more drunken travelers, particularly at a time when many find travel that involving enhanced screening and crowded planes more stressful than ever.

As a high-margin, non-perishable commodity, alcohol can bring big profits to some airport retailers who pay airports based on their revenue. Food and beverage sales for the 50 best-performing airports in North America were slightly more than \$3 billion in 2009.

Airlines say these offerings are to satisfy passenger requests, make the travel experience more enjoyable and entice fliers to try other amenities, such as premium seating.

American Airlines is now offering an in-flight "happy hour" for December on certain flights with \$5 wine, beer & cocktails on trips that take off between 5 and 6 p.m. American began offering complimentary drinks in its domestic Admirals Club lounges on Oct. 1, and passengers who purchase a day pass can also partake. "Our customers asked for it," says AA's Stacey Frantz.

No airlines have been penalized for ground delays

The DOT acknowledged this week that it had yet to levy any penalties in any of the dozen cases since May involving tarmac delays of at least three hours.

Under the new rule, violations are subject to a fine of up to \$27,500 per passenger per flight.

Such fines could cost airlines millions of dollars, but so far the violations have triggered nothing more than a warning letter or two, the DOT said.

The only fines the DOT has levied during that time for tarmac delays were \$12,000 against United and one other airline for filing inaccurate reports. As for violations since May, the DOT said it "is continuing to investigate several incidents."

The agency said, "Some investigations have been closed because they occurred under circumstances excepted by the tarmac delay rule, such as instances involving safety, security or air traffic control operations issues. In other cases, the tarmac delays violated the three-hour rule by only a few minutes, and DOT determined the carrier had worked to comply with the rule." Some carriers received warnings, the DOT said.

THE SMART MONEY

Online travel agencies losing ground

If you have ever dreaded sitting down at your computer to make travel arrangements or felt frustrated by all the time and effort it took to sort through pages of results for flights and hotels, join the crowd. A new report by Forrester Research found that many consumers were fed up with the complicated process of planning and booking travel.

Web customers are forced to figure out extra fees, wade through fine print and understand industry

terms like the difference between a deluxe and a standard room, in addition to trying to find out inside information themselves about destinations, flights and hotels.

Almost one-third of respondents to a recent survey who booked their trips online said they would be interested in going to a good traditional travel agent. That number is up from 23 percent as recently as 2008. Another Forrester report found that the number of leisure travelers who enjoyed using the Web to plan and book their vacations dropped from 53 percent in 2007 to 46 percent this year.

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Discount online travel agencies like Priceline.com and others lost big in New York State Supreme Court when a judge dismissed their lawsuit against the city. The lawsuit targeted a law which levied a tax on the service fees pocketed by the online agencies and forced the companies to provide customers with a breakdown of the hotel taxes on their bill.

The court's moves means that online-travel bookers will have to pay the city the full amount of the city hotel tax they collect based upon the quoted room rate, rather than a lower rate they might have negotiated internally with the hotel operator.

In a destination city like New York, the Hotel Room Occupancy Tax is a big deal, producing \$363 million in tax revenue for the city last year. Cities across the nation are having this battle with online travel-booking sites, with new lawsuits flying. A Superior Court judge in Atlanta ruled in July that the online agencies were cheating the city out of hotel occupancy taxes, ordering that taxes be based on the total room rate paid by the customer.

Industry groups like the Interactive Travel Services Association warn that these laws will result in higher rates for rooms booked online.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Rental car road help could cost you

Frequent renters are finding that rental car companies, which once came to customers' rescue with free roadside assistance, increasingly are charging them when the companies' cars have trouble on the road — especially if travelers don't pay extra for roadside assistance coverage.

Roadside-assistance charges can apply to such aid as changing a flat tire, locking keys in a car or jumping a dead battery. But they don't apply to every problem a driver encounters out on the road in every instance. The companies say they'll provide free service if the renter didn't cause the problem.

"Essentially, Hertz pays the costs related to mechanical defects not caused by the customer or an accident," says Hertz spokeswoman Paula Rivera.

Hertz and Enterprise began charging to change a flat tire last year if customers haven't paid extra for roadside assistance coverage. So do their competitors and Enterprise's other two affiliated brands, National and Alamo.

The companies sell roadside assistance packages at the rental counter, charging between \$2 and \$5 daily in most areas. Without a roadside-assistance package, Hertz charges \$67 to change a flat tire, deliver gas or jump-start a battery that died from renter negligence. Getting keys out of a locked car is \$73.50. Included in each charge is a \$25 "administrative fee."

Vehicles that need to be towed are charged a \$25 administrative fee, a \$47 towing fee and \$2.75 per mile for tows more than 5 miles.

Many frequent business travelers say they've avoided companies' charges by calling AAA or renting cars equipped with an On-Star safety system.

THE GREAT ESCAPE



Orient-Express Sicily

Francis Ford Coppola may have helped put Sicily on the map when he chose to film parts of the "Godfather" saga there, but the popular resort city of Taormina on the island's east coast has been drawing visitors (and conquerors) for thousands of years before the Corleone family came on the scene.

A key attraction is the ancient Greco-Roman theater, overlooking the Ionian Sea and Mount Etna beyond. And set high in the rocky hill, **Grand Hotel Timeo** has long been known as one of Italy's most glamorous retreats.



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